

Summary of Statement
by Janet Dewey, Executive Director Air Bag Safety Campaign to the
U.S. House of Representatives
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There are many **aspects** to the very complex issue regarding air bags including regulatory, technology and **behavioral** considerations. The focus of the Air Bag Safety Campaign is on the behavioral issues relating to air bag safety.

The Campaign, under the auspices of the National Safety Council, is a public/private partnership of domestic and **international** automobile manufacturers, seven of the leading U.S. insurance companies, occupant restraint **manufacturers**, government agencies, and health and **safety** organizations. The goal of the Campaign is to **maximize** the benefits and **minimize** the risks associated with air bags.

More than 1800 lives have **been** saved by air bags since 1986. These real people - moms, dads, grandparents -- are alive today because for many, the combination of their safety belt and air bags kept them safe in a serious **crash**. However, 63 air bag related deaths have been **confirmed** since 1990. **There** are for the most part clear patterns to the injuries and fatalities. Consequently, there are distinct behavioral changes we must make. The recommended basic safety steps include:

- Always wear safety belts properly using **both** lap and shoulder belts where available.
- Sit **as** far away from the steering wheel as practical. Maintain **10-12** inches **from** the steering wheel hub to the chest whenever possible.
- Children age 12 and under should ride properly buckled up in rear seats in child safety seats or **safety** belts appropriate for their age and size.
- Infants should NEVER ride in the **front** seats of a vehicle with a passenger side air bag.
- For pregnant women, place the lap portion of the safety belt under the abdomen as low as possible on the hips and across the upper thighs.

Following these simple safety steps are the most immediate actions the public can take to reduce potential air bag **related** injuries. The necessity of behavioral changes is even more critical given the knowledge that according to National Highway **Traffic Safety Administration** (NHTSA) investigations, 34 of the 38 children killed in crashes involving deploying air bags were either completely unbuckled or were placed in infant seats in **front** of passenger side air bags. It should be noted that these basic safety steps will help reduce injuries in crashes whether or not the vehicle is **equipped** with air bags.

The challenge to change basic behavior and deeply **engrained** habits is great, but there **are encouraging** signs for real **progress** over the next few months and years. Recently, Secretary of Transportation **Slater** announced a plan by President **Clinton** to increase safety belt use in America from 68% to 85% and to reduce child occupant fatalities by 15%. The time **frame** for these **goals** is by the year 2000, only 33 months away. In addition, the National Governors Association and the U.S. Conference of Mayors have passed Air Bag Safety Campaign-sponsored resolutions to increase safety belt and child safety seat **use**. Most important, the public has voiced **great** support for upgraded child passenger safety and safety belt laws and for high **visibility** enforcement of these laws.

We must **rely** on the **combination** of **proven** techniques to change behavior in this **area** of **traffic** safety -- education **paired** with high visibility enforcement and upgraded safety belt and child safety seat laws.